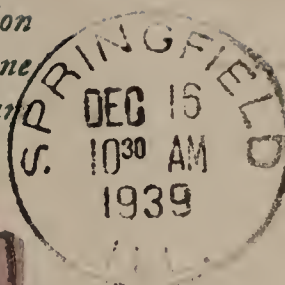




*On December 16, 1839, The Cotillion
Party Was Held At Springfield. One
Of The Managers Was Abraham
Lincoln.*



*The American House At Springfield
Scene Of The Cotillion Party.*



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On December 16, 1839 Springfield Society Held A Cotillion Party With Abraham Lincoln As One Of The Managers. S S S



Man was formed for society.

Blackstone

PERHAPS the crowning event of Springfield's debut as the capital city of Illinois, was the Cotillion Party. By the latter part of 1839 all the branches of the state government were functioning like a well oiled machine. From every part of the state came politicians and statesmen to attend the legislature, came lawyers to attend the courts, came merchants and tradesmen to lobby a law or receive a charter or franchise. Transportation of that era did not allow for week-end trips back home and the slow processes of the law and government conspired to detain men in Springfield sometimes for the entire winter. Many transients brought their wives along and perhaps an eligible daughter or two. This visiting population constituted a distinct social problem and Springfield was not to be found inhospitable. In the old days when Springfield was nothing more than a country town, entertainments were informal and provincial in character, but the new atmosphere demanded something more metropolitan.

To touch off the spark, Abraham Lincoln and a long list of the towns leading politicians, merchants and eligible bachelors, sponsored the Cotillion Party. Little indeed is known of the event aside from the fact that it was held and probably enjoyed. It was a newsy event of too much moment to find its way into the newspaper except perhaps in a cursory way, and so a detailed account of it was never handed down to us. It appears however, to have set the precedent for many such affairs in years to come and is thought of as Springfield's first bid for social supremacy.

The Cotillion Party, swing session of a century ago, was held in the best hotel in Springfield, the American House. It stands today somewhat altered

in appearance, on the south-east corner of the public square. It was a type of hotel that most rising young towns indulged in during the boom times of the middle thirties. The depression of 1837 invariably gave them a set back and they lapsed into second rate hotels with few guests and plenty of mortgages. The American House was built under somewhat different circumstances however, being erected during the depression for the express purpose of catering to the needs of visitors to the capital. It was opened in November 1838, with a fanfare banquet and a manager imported from Boston. Thereafter through its heyday it continued to be the gathering place for Springfield's elite. At times the ball room was used for a traveling troupe of Thespians or perhaps a performance or two of the Swiss Bell Ringers. Martin Van Buren was entertained here in 1842 and the political orgies of rising young senators and congressmen were invariably given here.

The Cotillion Party itself is of little importance except for the fact that it shows how interested Abraham Lincoln was in promoting Springfield as a show place. He had done what he could to locate the capital here and he had done it well. He was one of the signers of the note guaranteeing the erection of the state house, a member of the town council, of the legislature and the local bar. He could do no less than help to inspire a fondness for genteel entertainments and endeavors.

THEODORE S. CHARNNEY

The cachet symbolic of this event is a picture of the American House as it appeared in Lincoln's day. The building stands today at the Southeast corner of Sixth and Adams Street in Springfield, though it is no longer in use as a hotel. Prepared by THE POOR RICHARD PRESS, 5053 Montana Street, Chicago, Illinois.

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